

**Keith Bishop - CT Vineyard & Winery Association
Testimony Before the Environment Committee
March 7, 2014**

**In Support of SB 315 An Act Concerning Farmer's Market
Wine Sales Permits and Establishing an Off Site Farm
Winery Sales and Tasting Permits**



Good Afternoon Senator Meyer and Representative Gentile, my name is Keith Bishop and I am a 5th generation farmer. My family has been farming since 1871 in Guilford CT. We currently grow fruits and vegetables across 313 acres. We established our winery, 8 years ago and we currently produce about 2000 cases and host over 6,000 visitors to our tasting room each year. The diversity of our farm that draws customers to buy our products from the Farm Market, Pick Your Own, Winery to our CSA provides stability that is preserving our 313 acres.

I serve as Treasurer of the Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association. The Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association consists of 27 farm wineries, spread across the state that market ourselves collectively as the Connecticut Wine Trail. The purpose of our association is to promote the cultivation of grapes and the production of wine in Connecticut.

I am here today in support of SB 315 An Act Concerning Farmer's Market Wine Sales Permits and Establishing an Off Site Farm Winery Sales and Tasting Permit. In essence, this bill would allow farm wineries to go to off site events, such as fairs or outings, and taste and sell CT wine. The bill is modeled after the catering liquor permit, which has been on the books for a number of years and has worked very well. Like caterers, we too would be required to notify liquor control of the location of the event. They then could inspect those locations to make sure that proper procedures are being followed and that alcohol was not in the hands of minors.

This bill came about because we have received many requests to attend fairs, like the Litchfield Jazz Festival, Renaissance Fairs, and non profits events that are fund raisers. We are unique businesses, mostly family owned and operated. We are steeped in agriculture and preserve CT's farmland. We are a tourist destinations that also create a draw for other local businesses of many, and we also manufacture a local sustainable product that is desirable to many residents. Having a permit such as this would allow us to share our products in different regions across the state, and drive individuals to our tasting rooms for repeat visits.

In addition we are seeking amendment to the current Farmer's Market law to allow tastings. Although many are using the current permit to attend Farmer's Markets, without consumers having the ability to taste, product sales have not materialized to what we thought they would. Allowing tastings would not only give the consumer what they want, it would make the current practice of attending Farmer's Markets more profitable.

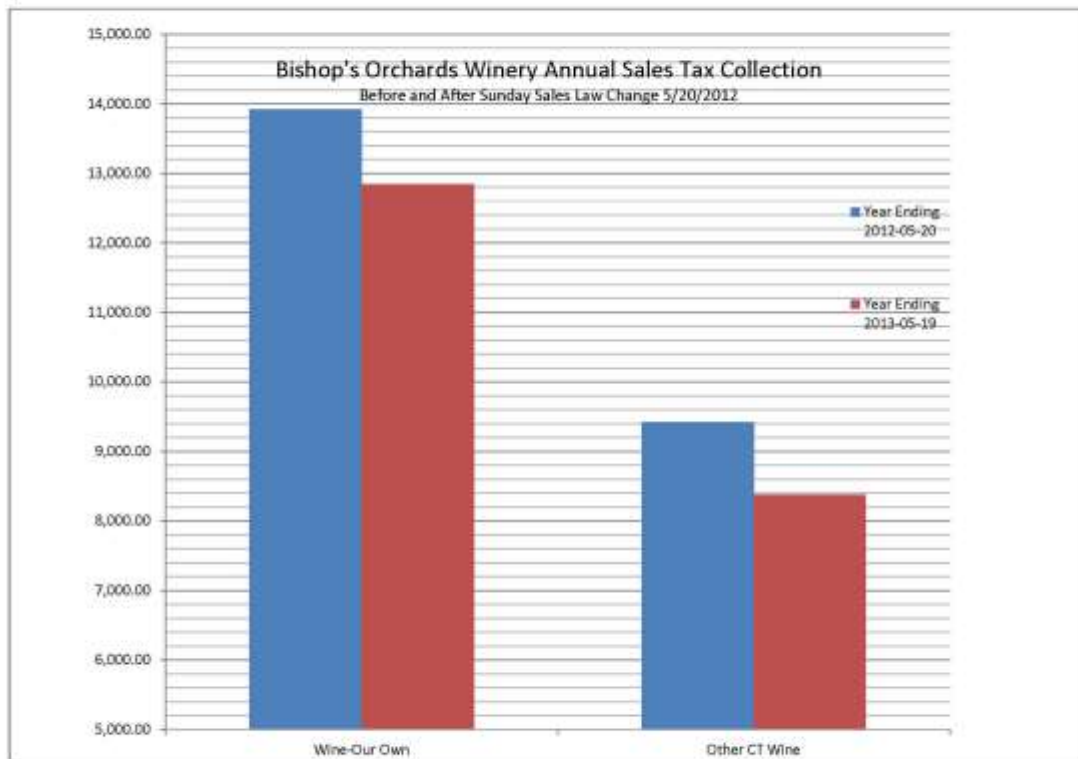
Over the past few years the CT wine industry sales have decreased (see chart on next page). When the initial laws were enacted for farm wineries, certain privileges were afforded to us because we are agricultural businesses and it is harder to bring our products to market because we do not have large volume. Over the years many of those privileges have eroded away. Losing the exclusivity of Sunday sales, and package stores having increased tasting and educational classes have eaten away sales. After reviewing recent data (Nov 2013) from CT DRS, small wineries as a group were down 45%, while wine sales through the package stores were up.

Creating this permit would help CT wineries to reach new markets and increase our sales to keep our businesses and our farms viable, helping to preserve open space under winery ownership.

We do however ask that there be 2 minor changes in the language:

1. This permit allows only for the sale of wines labeled as Connecticut wine under Federal TTB regulations (essentially means it is made from CT Grown fruit)
2. Have no restriction on the number of events that a winery can attend.

The chart below shows the comparison between 2 full years of sales tax collections, before and after the law change that allowed Sunday Sales at package stores. Over \$2,100 of sales taxes were lost from our winery and not earned by the State of CT (and we obviously lost sales). Since our winery has substantial sales of wines from other CT Wineries, the impact is spread to those other wineries as well from our loss of sales.



Thank you for your time and consideration of this measure.

Keith B. Bishop Co-CEO, Treasurer & Winemaker
Bishop's Orchards 1355 Boston Post Rd. Guilford, CT 06437-2399
[\(203\)453-2338 x210](tel:(203)453-2338) fax [\(203\)458-7125](tel:(203)458-7125) www.bishopsorchards.com